

Group of Gazan children get first glimpse of Jerusalem

Here's a "ray of sunshine" story about the UN arranging for 91 children from Gaza to visit Jerusalem. Gaza has been under an Israeli blockade since 2006 and has become, according to CBS News' reporter, Bob Simons, "the world's largest, open air prison."

Conditions since the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza continue to deteriorate with [electricity](#) available only a few hours a day and almost no potable water available. After spending a month in Palestine and Israel, on a fact finding mission, it is obvious to this observer that Israel's policies toward Palestinians are cruel and unfair. We will be featuring articles about this trip around the theme of "Voices in Palestine Crying Out for Peace and Justice." [Ed.-TEC]

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Jerusalem (AFP- 8/20/2017 in Yahoo News) - Dozens of Palestinian children from the Gaza Strip saw Jerusalem and two of its holy sites for the first time on Sunday as part of a UN-run exchange programme.

Ninety-one children aged between eight and 14 crossed from the blockaded Palestinian enclave into Israel before visiting Jerusalem, according to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.



A Palestinian girl from Gaza takes a selfie outside the Dome of the Rock mosque in the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City on August 20, 2017 (AFP Photo/AHMAD GHARABLI)

All but seven had never been out of Gaza, said UNRWA's Scott Anderson.

The children visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built at the site where Christians believe Jesus was crucified and buried, and the Al-Aqsa mosque compound nearby, he said.

Both sites are in Jerusalem's Old City.

The children prayed and took pictures at the mosque compound, which also includes the golden-topped Dome of the Rock, an AFP journalist reported.

The compound is the third-holiest in Islam and the most sacred for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

"They were over-the-moon excited," Anderson said. "There's really no other way to describe it."

The children later travelled to Ramallah and will remain in the occupied West Bank, the other Palestinian territory separated from Gaza by Israeli territory, until Friday.

They will visit various West Bank cities throughout the week.

The Gaza Strip, run by Islamist movement Hamas, has been under an Israeli blockade for a decade.

Gazans need Israeli permission to visit the West Bank and Jerusalem, which requires them to enter Israeli territory.

The vast majority of the children on Sunday's trip had never been to Jerusalem even though it is only some 75 kilometres (around 45 miles) from Gaza City.

Gaza's crossing with Egypt -- the only other country with which it shares a border -- has also remained largely closed in recent years.

Palestinian militants in Gaza and Israel have fought three wars since 2008.

UN officials have called for an end to the blockade, citing deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the enclave of two million people.

Israel says it is needed to stop Hamas from obtaining weapons or materials that could be used to make them.

The exchange programme, in its first year, included 38 Palestinian children from the West Bank visiting the Gaza Strip a few weeks ago.

UNRWA hopes to carry out more such exchanges in the future.